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Sound Transit, Bellevue set to finalize details of East Link partnership
Collaboration would create wins for transit riders, residents and businesses, including downtown Bellevue tunnel and Bel-Red TOD projects; City of Bellevue public hearing scheduled for April 13

Sound Transit and City of Bellevue leaders today announced a proposed agreement to move ahead with construction of the voter-approved East Link Extension in a way that minimizes construction impacts, commits the city's financial contribution to a downtown tunnel, and promotes the city's Bel-Red Corridor land use vision.

"With this unprecedented partnership, we will reduce Bellevue's share of the tunnel's cost, while helping to deliver East Link on schedule and promoting transit-oriented development throughout the Bel-Red Corridor," said Sound Transit Board Chair and King County Executive Dow Constantine. "The people of Bellevue and of the entire region will enjoy the benefits of greater mobility for generations to come."

"This draft agreement is an important step toward connecting Bellevue and the Eastside to our growing regional light rail system," said Bellevue Mayor and Sound Transit Boardmember Claudia Balducci. "It is a solution that has been years in the making and is only possible because of the commitment of leaders from across the region to work collaboratively toward an important investment for the traveling public. For Bellevue, the balance struck in the proposed agreement reflects the city's clear vision for expanded mobility, recognizes our growing role in a truly regional economy, and supports transit-oriented development in the Bel-Red corridor."

The proposed agreement was developed between designated elected members of both agencies, and is now subject to review and approval by the Sound Transit Board of Directors and the Bellevue City Council. Their provisions address key city interests in the project while helping Sound Transit start construction next year and stay on track to open the line in 2023.

The Bellevue City Council will discuss the draft agreement at the Monday, April 6 city council study session, and hold a public hearing on this topic at the Monday, April 13, city council meeting. The Sound Transit Board will consider the agreement on April 23.

"The draft MOU represents a fair deal," Bellevue Deputy Mayor Kevin Wallace said. "The City is left in the black financially, and we were able to negotiate important wins with Sound Transit for the protection of Bellevue's neighborhoods and businesses from the impacts of the train."

A 2011 memorandum of understanding outlined up to \$160 million in city contributions to the downtown Bellevue tunnel. Since then, Bellevue and Sound Transit officials have worked continuously to find solutions for reducing costs. Joint efforts included a 16-month public process in 2012 and 2013 to identify cost-reducing design options. That and other efforts led to the proposed agreement announced today, which would eliminate a \$60 million contribution that would have been due at the end of the project under the terms of the initial MOU. The agreement would finalize the terms of Bellevue's upfront contribution, valued in the 2011 MOU at \$100 million.

In addition to finalizing the City's financial contribution to the project, which ensures inclusion of the downtown tunnel and other mitigation measures in the project design, the proposed agreement resolves other issues that have developed since the original MOU. Central to this agreement are terms surrounding the potential Operations and Maintenance Satellite Facility (OMSF). As part of an ongoing environmental process studying multiple sites, the Sound Transit Board identified a location within Bellevue's Bel-Red area as its preferred alternative, and is expected to make a final selection later this year after the environmental review is complete. The proposed agreement includes provisions to address the OMSF facility and its impact on the transit-oriented development that is the centerpiece of the City's long range plan for Bel-Red. It also incorporates features identified through a stakeholder process in late 2014.

By 2030 East Link is projected to carry about 50,000 riders each weekday with stations in Seattle, Mercer Island, South Bellevue, downtown Bellevue and the Bel-Red and Overlake areas. As the region's population continues growing East Link will provide expanded transportation capacity in the I-90 corridor. Increases in the length and frequency of trains over time offer the capacity to carry from 8,000 to 12,000 people per hour in each direction, more than doubling the person-carrying capacity of I-90.

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